



Rep. Kathy Lambert



45th District 1998 Session Update



Rep. Bill Backlund

Protecting Taxpayers — Re-shaping Government



Dear Friends:

As the state Legislature nears the midpoint of the 1998 session, we wanted to update you on issues being debated in Olympia, as well as invite you to participate in some upcoming events.

Building on our record of the past three years, we're continuing to fight for smaller, more responsible government and tax relief for the people of Washington. Last year, we held the budget under the I-601 limits, and this year, we're strongly resisting the attempts by special interests groups to increase spending further. We are also committed to reducing your tax burden, and helping you keep more of your hard-earned money.

Addressing the problem of traffic congestion is a high priority this year. However, there is much debate about whether or not an increase in the gas tax is necessary to pay for improvements to our transportation system. We believe strongly that a gas tax increase is not necessary, but that significant improvement in transportation can be made with existing revenue by prioritizing spending, making sure your tax dollars are not wasted on unnecessary projects and bureaucracy, and rethinking some transportation policy.

Pushing forward with improvements to our schools is also high on the legislative agenda. We believe giving more power to local communities, raising academic standards, and getting rid of the red tape that ties teachers' hands will go a long way toward preparing our children for the 21st century.

After approving significant reforms to improve our state's juvenile justice system last session, the Legislature is working to crack down on drunk drivers this year. When a mother in Issaquah was killed by a repeat DUI offender last year, we were all reminded that we must do more to combat this terrible crime. The Legislature will enact tough new laws to make sure people who drink and drive are held responsible for their actions.

We'd like to invite everyone in the 45th District to our town hall meetings! On Saturday, Feb. 21, we'll hold a morning meeting at the Woodinville Library, and in the afternoon we'll be in Redmond. We also hope you can join us in Olympia on Wednesday, Feb. 25, for our annual 45th District Day, where you can take a look at the state Legislature up close. You'll find more information on these events on the back of this newsletter.

Finally, let us say what a privilege it is to represent you. We're honored to serve you, and, throughout the session, we encourage you to call, write or e-mail us with your questions, comments and concerns.

Sincerely,

Kathy Lambert

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Legislature keeps focus on controlling spending, cutting taxes

Over the past three years, we have been successful in adopting and enacting reforms that address our primary objective of protecting taxpayers.

Among these major accomplishments are budgets that have limited state spending and controlled the growth of government, tax cuts that have allowed Washingtonians to keep more of their own money, and changes in state rules and regulations that have made government operate more efficiently and effectively. This responsible spending has helped grow a budget surplus of more than \$850 million, much of which we will save in a "rainy day" reserve account to be used in case of future economic downturns, as well as a more favorable bond rating that has saved taxpayers \$3 million in interest alone.

This session, we are pursuing further measures to continue our progress toward making government more accountable to taxpayers, including holding the line on state spending and steadfastly opposing any attempts to undo or weaken the I-601 spending limit.

In addition to spending controls, Washington taxpayers have benefitted from more than \$1 billion in tax cuts over the past three years. This session, we are continuing to fight to allow people to keep more of their own hard-earned income by reducing onerous tax regulations and pursuing further permanent tax relief, specifically a reduction in the "car tab tax" and further property tax reforms.



Reducing traffic congestion without a gas tax increase

Everyone knows how frustrating it is to sit in a car or on a bus waiting for the road to clear. Our region's economic prosperity also depends on an efficient transportation system. The simple fact is, if we don't invest in maintenance and new construction now, we will pay a higher price later.

The Legislature will pass a transportation bill this session that will fund the transportation improvements necessary to keep our citizens and our economy moving into the 21st century.

However, while the governor has called for a gas tax increase of 11 cents per gallon over the next five years to pay for road improvements, Republicans in the Legislature have proposed a plan that funds the same improvements with existing revenue, not by increasing the gas tax. Additionally, we have proposed giving car owners a \$45-per-vehicle "car tab tax" cut.

The Republican plan would use more of the money collected from the Motor Vehicle Excise Tax (MVET) -- the amount you pay to renew your license tabs -- for transportation projects. Currently, only 16 percent of MVET goes directly to the transportation fund. The rest goes to transit projects, the state general fund, and to local governments for criminal justice funding.

We are proposing to shift more MVET funds to transportation to pay for new projects to reduce congestion and improve freight mobility. The plan would also increase funding for local criminal justice programs to help reduce crime in our communities.

Because our funding package requires a transfer between budgets, we will submit it to the voters in November 1998 so the people can re-affirm and strengthen Initiative 601. I-601 was passed by voters in 1992 and sets limits on state spending.

We believe this plan is a responsible way to address Washington's transportation needs. In short, both plans provide the same amount of money for transportation projects. Both reduce the motor vehicle excise tax. And both protect programs supported by the general fund, including education. The only difference is that the Republican plan accomplishes these objectives without a tax increase.

Government must change its approach to problem-solving, from the traditional "knee-jerk" reaction of simply raising taxes to a concerted effort to study the issues and find a solution that will not raise your taxes. That's been our approach on transportation, and we feel it is the more responsible way of dealing with the issue.

Improving education by ensuring every student can read

In September, the results of a statewide test of fourth-graders showed us how far we still have to go in education reform. Here are the troubling results:

- Only 22 percent of fourth-graders met the mathematics standard
- 42 percent met the writing standard
- 48 percent met the reading standard
- 62 percent met the listening standard

We must act now to make sure every child gets a top-notch education. And the answer lies not in more government regulation from Olympia, but in empowering local communities to pursue academic excellence.

Nothing is more important for learning than the ability to read. Last session, the Legislature required testing at the second-grade level of all students for reading ability, to identify and address reading problems quickly and early. This year, further reforms are also being adopted to help ensure every student develops early reading skills.

Other education improvements the Legislature is pursuing in the '98 session include:

- Higher academic standards
- More disciplined learning environments
- Local control of education
- Adequate, responsible budgets
- Accountability for academic results

We have good teachers, and we have students who are capable of learning. But we must change the system so that academic achievement is not just a goal, but a reality.



Staying the course on welfare reform

The 1997 Legislature brought revolutionary changes to Washington's welfare system. For years, the public has called for work requirements and time limits on public assistance eligibility. In 1997, the Republican Legislature delivered a new WorkFirst program requiring able-bodied people to find jobs and start their way to self-sufficiency.

WorkFirst is working. In just two months after the first phase of changes took effect, the goal of moving 11.5 percent of welfare families off assistance by June 1999 had already nearly been achieved -- almost 18 months early! The number of families on welfare steadily continues to drop.

This year, the Legislature is working with the state Department of Social and Health Services to ensure the program continues to reach its goals and families new to the workforce have the resources they need to remain off welfare.

Making our communities safe and secure

Juvenile Justice:

Last year, responding to the increase in violent juvenile crime, the Legislature enacted a juvenile justice reform measure that makes the most significant changes in 20 years. Those changes included giving greater flexibility to judges and prosecutors in sentencing juvenile offenders, and authorizing tougher punishment for the most dangerous criminals.

This year, the Legislature is continuing to reform the juvenile justice system.

These are the changes we are pursuing this session to keep convicted offenders from threatening our safety:

- Improved supervision and monitoring of offenders sentenced to juvenile facilities
- Better screening of juvenile offenders to ensure that law-abiding citizens are protected from those who pose a threat
- Better communication between juvenile authorities and law enforcement to make sure each offender's full record is known and the offender is treated appropriately
- Stronger policies for safe operation of private group homes

Drunk Driving:

We're also working on ways to crack down on drunk driving. During the holidays, we both spent evenings riding along with troopers from the Washington State Patrol as they targeted drunk drivers. This experience is helping us work for effective reforms to help law enforcement keep DUI offenders off the streets.

The Legislature is debating the following changes to state law:

- Increasing jail time for DUI offenders
- Keeping first DUI convictions on an offender's record for five years; keeping subsequent DUI offenses on record permanently
- Lowering the legal blood-alcohol level from .10 to .08
- Authorizing blood tests for motorists who are obviously inebriated
- Impounding vehicles after second offense
- Requiring automatic 90-day license suspension

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TOWN HALLS!

**We want to hear from you!
Attend one of our town hall meetings...**

45th District Town Hall Meetings



Woodinville

Saturday, Feb. 21

10:15 a.m. - 11:45 a.m.

Woodinville Library
17105 Avondale Rd. NE

Redmond

Saturday, Feb. 21

1 p.m. - 2:30 p.m.

Lake Washington School
District Resource Ctr.
16250 NE 74th St. (off Leary Way)

We'll be talking about issues before the Legislature, and asking you for your input.

Or join us in Olympia for the day!

45th District Day at the State Capitol

Wednesday, Feb. 25.

Join us in Olympia for the day to tour the state Capitol campus, have lunch with us and see firsthand the state Legislature in session. Please RSVP by Feb. 23 at (360) 786-7822.

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**Washington State Legislature
1998 Session Update**

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